

# Status of Consumer Education and Financial Education in Canada (2016)

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Sue L. T. McGregor  
*McGregor Consulting Group*

## Abstract

This article reports on the status of consumer education in Canada in 2016 (junior and senior high), relative to the 2015-initiated federal national financial education/literacy strategy. Questions addressed: (1) Is it necessary to have separate financial education curricula when consumer education is available? and (2) Are the existing consumer education curricula adequate? After conceptualizing consumer education and literacy relative to financial education and literacy, a content analysis of provincial and territorial education documents identified 64 courses containing consumer-related content in seven subject areas. The majority (73%) of the 216 instances of consumer-related content—mostly (68%) found in home economics/family studies, social studies, mathematics, and business—pertained to resource management, with equal coverage for each of citizen participation (14%) and decision making (13%). Most (73%) of the courses were not offered until senior high. Results confirmed a fragmented and inconsistent approach to consumer education across subject areas, grade levels, provinces/territories, and regions. To stimulate dialogue, the

national financial education strategy is framed as a stop-gap measure until there is political will for a pan-Canadian consumer education curriculum, predicated on the assumption that consumer education (not financial education) better prepares citizens for any future global depression.

*Keywords:* consumer education, financial education, financial literacy, consumer literacy, curriculum, Canada

## Résumé

Cet article fait état du statut de l'éducation à la consommation au Canada en 2016 (dans les écoles secondaires), concernant le plan de stratégie nationale pour la littératie financière amorcé en 2015. Les questions suivantes sont traitées : (1) est-il nécessaire d'avoir des programmes d'éducation financière indépendants alors qu'une éducation à la consommation est offerte? (2) Les curriculums d'éducation à la consommation actuels sont-ils adéquats? Après une mise en contexte de l'éducation à la consommation et des concepts relatifs à la littératie financière, une analyse de contenu de documents provinciaux et territoriaux mène à l'identification de 64 cours ayant un contenu en rapport avec la consommation dans sept disciplines. La majorité (73 %) des 216 occurrences qui touchent le consommateur—principalement (68%) retrouvées en économie familiale, études sociales, mathématiques et affaires—se rapportent à la gestion quotidienne des ressources de manière responsable, accordant une importance égale à la participation citoyenne (14%) et à la prise de décision (13%). La plupart de ces cours (73%) n'étaient pas offerts avant la fin du secondaire. Les résultats confirment une approche fragmentée et inégale en éducation à la consommation à travers les disciplines, les niveaux d'enseignement, les provinces/territoires et les régions. Afin d'ouvrir la discussion, la stratégie nationale pour la littératie financière est conçue comme une mesure provisoire jusqu'à ce qu'il y ait une volonté politique pour un programme pancanadien d'éducation à la consommation se fondant sur l'idée que l'éducation du consommateur (et non pas l'éducation financière) prépare mieux les citoyens en cas de récession éventuelle.

*Mots-clés :* éducation à la consommation, éducation financière, littératie financière, consommateur, curriculum, Canada

## Introduction

Many countries are embracing financial education and financial literacy (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012, 2013). Using Canada as a case, this article reports on a study that explored the links between financial education for financial literacy and the broader topic of consumer education for consumer literacy. Only two previous studies have explored the status of consumer education in Canada (Canadian Consumer Council [CCC], 1970; McGregor, 2000). No studies have linked financial education and consumer education in Canada, although a plethora of research now exists about financial education and financial literacy.

Canada's recent focus on financial education and financial literacy (Financial Consumer Agency of Canada [FCAC], 2015; Rooney, 2015), begs several questions. Is it necessary to have separate financial education curricula when consumer education is available? Conversely, are the existing provincial and territorial consumer education curricula adequate for the consumer challenges of the 21st century? A larger question is whether being literate in personal finances is enough in today's complex marketplace, or do students need the entire gambit of consumer education topics so they can achieve consumer literacy, even consumer acumen (see McGregor, 2011)? From another perspective, Canada now has a national strategy for financial education (FCAC, 2015), to be discussed. Will this narrowly focused measure impede the possibility of ever having a national strategy for consumer education, as recommended by McGregor (2000), or can the national financial education strategy be used as a stepping stone for a future pan-Canadian consumer education strategy?

To address these questions, the inception of both consumer education and financial education is discussed, and then each is defined within the OECD context. The results of two earlier studies concerned with the status of consumer education in Canada are recounted, followed with an overview of the OECD financial education initiative, and the federal government's efforts to bring this notion to Canada. As consumer and financial education are presented, various related concepts are defined and then compared. The article ends with a report of the results and discussion of the implications of a third study about the status of consumer education in Canada, including how the current state of affairs ties in with the contemporary financial education movement.

## **Inception of Consumer and Financial Education**

The term *consumer education* has been in use since the early 1900s, an example being two papers presented at the 1909 final founding conference of the home economics discipline in North America (Van Horn, 1941). Thirty years later, the term finally entered the wider educational philosophy and curriculum terminology, despite lacking a common, explicit definition (American Home Economics Association and Home Economics Department of the National Education Association, 1945).

It is no coincidence that consumer education emerged as a necessary school topic after the Great Depression in the 1930s. After a false sense of financial security during the Roaring Twenties, the US stock market crashed in 1929, leading to the failure of nearly half of the banks (11,000). When this happened, nearly two-thirds (60%) of the US population was already living in poverty. The depression of the economy manifested in massive, wide-spread unemployment. Consumers stopped spending, so manufacturers stopped producing, creating more unemployment, and exacerbating existing poverty. This dire situation was compounded with an agricultural depression whereby the America's Plains drought (the Dust Bowl, 1930–36) drove thousands from rural areas to urban areas, already rife with poverty, hunger, and unemployment (Croft Communications, 2016). Motivated by these crises, 25,000 US high schools were providing consumer education in the 1930s (Langrehr & Mason, 1977).

The concept of financial education has its seeds in consumer education, but its need was predicated on a second Great Depression. Education that intentionally focuses on personal finances became a pressing international issue in the “aftermath of the [2008] global financial crisis” (OECD, 2011, p. 2). This depression manifested in massive declines in consumer wealth and income (due to stock market losses and unemployment from business closures) as well as declines in housing and shelter options (evictions and foreclosures), consumer spending and confidence, and consumer savings and investing. In addition to financial stress, people experienced psychological stress (depressions, suicides) due to evictions, foreclosures, and job losses (Fowler, Gladden, Vagi, Barnes, & Frazier, 2015).

As a result, financial education in schools is now deemed necessary because youth are facing increasingly complex and sophisticated financial products, services, and attendant risks (e.g., debt, identity theft) at ever-earlier ages. The OECD (2011) anticipated

that integrating financial education into the school curricula would create a “more sound financial culture and...sound financial habits” in the next generation of adults (p. 2). To that end, during the last decade, the OECD (2005, 2012, 2013) has actively encouraged and facilitated its 35 member states as they install national strategies for financial education to mitigate another global depression.

## Defining Consumer and Financial Education

The OECD is as deeply concerned with consumer education as it is with financial education, recommending consumer education as a policy instrument because it provides a long-term approach to developing lasting skills and bringing about changes in consumer behaviour (OECD, 2010). In its special project on *Promoting Consumer Education*, the OECD (2009) embraced Wells and Atherton’s (1998) definition. Consumer education is “a process of gaining skills, knowledge and understanding required for living in a consumer society [in order to] make full use of the range of consumer opportunities present in today’s complex marketplace” (p. 15).

Despite the OECD’s focus on the need for its member states to use consumer education as a policy instrument, only 17 American states currently mandate that courses contain personal finance, and only five states require a standalone personal finance course (Council for Economic Education, 2016). On the European front, more than 50% of school curricula include consumer education, although little is used in the classroom (European Network for Consumer Education, 2007; OECD, 2009). In Canada, “surveys undertaken by FCAC showed that many teachers are uncomfortable teaching financial life skills because they are not confident in their own financial literacy” (OECD, 2013, p. 44).

This lack of confidence is unfortunate because the more experienced teachers are with financial education instruction, the more students tend to learn and benefit from the curriculum (Yetter & Suiter, 2015). A low level of financial literacy among educators may affect the financial literacy of the next generation (BenDavid-Hadar, 2015). Making matters worse, when consumer education “is included in the school curriculum, it is little used in the classroom” (OECD, 2009, p. 17). It may be “on the books,” and sanctioned by provincial and territorial governments, but it is not being taught. A vicious cycle ensues.

In this educational and political climate, the OECD is concurrently promoting a limited version of consumer education called *financial education*, anticipating that it will lead to financial literacy or capacity (Delgadillo, 2014). The OECD (2011) defined financial education as “the teaching of financial knowledge, understanding, skills, behaviours, attitudes and values which will enable students to make savvy and effective financial decisions in their daily life and when they become adults” (p. 3). It did not define nor distinguish financial decision from consumer decision. The former pertains to finances (i.e., the management of money), while the latter concerns more macro decisions taken as a consumer (e.g., purchasing [or not], using, and disposing of goods and services, the procurement of which requires finances).

Granted, in their final set of guidelines, the OECD (2013) viewed financial literacy as being more than making calculations about money, but it still confined it to competencies for making effective *financial decisions*, not consumer decisions. The OECD left the definition of *financial literacy* up to each individual member nation, advising nations to take a competency approach to reflect measurable outcomes to gauge improved literacy. The OECD (2011) recommended that the definition of financial literacy should:

...encompass the competencies that students need to develop in order to make effective and responsible financial decisions in their daily life and when they become adults. Competencies cover financial knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and behaviours and the ability to use these effectively. The definition [of financial literacy] may focus solely on the personal use and management of money and the impacts of financial decisions on the lives of individuals or it may include a broader perspective that takes account of the interaction between personal financial decision-making and wider society and environment. (p. 15)

In summary, according to the OECD (2013), financial education refers to teachers using a specially-designed curriculum to ensure that students gain the competencies necessary to be financially literate. This curriculum should include the following: (a) money and transactions; (b) planning and managing finances (saving and spending; credit and debt; financial decision-making); (c) risk and rewards; and (d) the financial landscape (consumer rights and responsibilities, and understanding the wider financial, economic, and social system). The discussion now shifts to an overview of both consumer and financial education in Canada, in conjunction with distinguishing among attendant concepts.

## **Consumer Education in Canada**

Henchey (1998) recommended that the Canadian education system should “provide instructions in organized bodies of knowledge...such as consumer education” (p. 5), intimating there should be standalone consumer education courses. Two studies have explored the status of consumer education in Canada. The first was conducted in 1970 by the now defunct CCC, an advisory group set up in 1967 to advise the first federal minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada. Its first task was to determine whether consumer education was being taught in Canadian schools, reporting that, “no Department of Education in Canada has a course in ‘Consumer Education’ at the present time” (chapter 2, p. 1). Rather, consumer education concepts were integrated into a variety of other school subjects, in descending order: home economics (all 10 provinces), business education (six), economics (four), mathematics (two), and social studies (one province).

Thirty years later, in a second status report, McGregor (2000) reported that four provinces had separate consumer education curricula (with the caveat that the Nova Scotia curriculum was dated 1977, and British Columbia’s [BC] was being discontinued). She found the same fragmented approach as did the CCC (1970), wherein consumer concepts were housed in other subject curricula, rather than standalone. Home economics, mathematics, business education, economics, law, and social studies still contained consumer concepts, with a newcomer being Career and Life Management (CALM). As a side note, the OECD (2009) identified fragmented approaches to consumer education curricula as a major challenge for its other member states.

Using Bannister and Monsma’s (1982) consumer concept classification system (CLASSI), McGregor (2000) compared her data with the CCC’s (1970). Despite a 30-year time lapse, she found a similar pattern. Most (84%) consumer concepts pertained to resource management, followed by decision making (11%), and then citizen participation (advocacy and protection) (5%). Within the resource management area, she observed a marked increase in concepts pertaining to financial planning (84%, up from 50%), and decision making and consumer choice (from 0% to 58%). In both studies, consumer education gave low priority to consumer advocacy and protection. McGregor and MacDonald (1998) noted a similar pattern in a then contemporary study about the content of Canadian university consumer education courses in home economics departments, which also prepared consumer educators.

## **Financial Education and Financial Literacy in Canada**

Eighteen years ago, McGregor (2000) recommended the development of a national consumer education curriculum for provincial and territorial adoption. Although this pan curriculum did not materialize, the FCAC agency was legislated in 2001, mandated to strengthen Canadians' financial literacy. A decade later (in 2009), the Canadian Minister of Finance established a Task Force on Financial Literacy, charged with making recommendations on a national strategy to improve financial literacy. Its final report defined financial literacy as "having the knowledge, skills and confidence to make responsible financial decisions" (2010, p. 4). Like the OECD, the Canadian Task Force did not define financial decisions. A perusal of this final report revealed that the work was not focused on consumer education as it is broadly understood; rather, just one component of it, personal financial management.

Recommendation 19 of the Task Force on Financial Literacy alluded to consumer education in that the "Task Force recommends that the Government of Canada, in partnership with stakeholders, establish a comprehensive and ongoing public awareness campaign to promote awareness of the need for financial literacy" (Task Force on Financial Literacy, 2010, p. 64). As part of the discussion supporting Recommendation 19, the Task Force observed that Canada needs "intensified consumer education efforts, including... financial literacy programming in the school system" (p. 66). This wording suggests that the Task Force viewed financial literacy as part of a larger curriculum called consumer education, despite its work being informed by a commissioned concept paper on financial literacy (see Murray, 2011) that did not contain the concept of consumer education.

The Task Force on Financial Literacy also suggested that "regulators have a responsibility to...be proactive in disseminating consumer education materials and messages" (2010, p. 21). Disseminating materials and messages, however, is not the same as developing and implementing consumer education curriculum. In an ideal world, there would be standalone, nationwide consumer education offerings in all provinces and territories (OECD, 2011), as recommended by McGregor (2000); however, the Canadian constitution compromises this vision because education is not within federal jurisdiction. Architects of the Canadian national financial literacy strategy must remain cognizant of this as they "extend financial education initiatives...without encroaching on provincial and territorial education jurisdiction" (OECD, 2013, p. 44).

Canada now has a “National Strategy for Financial Literacy” (FCAC, 2015), and recently boasts a federally appointed Financial Literacy Leader (currently Jane Rooney) within the FCAC. There is an annual National Financial Literacy Conference, with November declared Financial Literacy Month. The government now hosts a newly developed online Canadian Financial Literacy Database. There is a National Steering Committee on Financial Literacy (as of 2014), and an Interdepartmental Committee on Financial Literacy (Rooney, 2015).

These initiatives stem from Canada’s endorsement of the OECD’s (2012) four high-level principles on national strategies for financial education, developed by its International Network on Financial Education (INFE). Created in 2008, the INFE promotes and facilitates international cooperation among policymakers and other stakeholders on financial education issues worldwide. In addition to the principle of (a) ensuring sufficient resources to implement a national financial education strategy, all nations agree to (b) prepare a vision and a strategic plan including targets and outcomes, (c) ensure financial education is included in the school curricula, and (d) put in place overall impact assessments of these education programs (e.g., national financial literacy surveys, and financial capacity metrics that measure individuals’ financial competencies) (OECD, 2012).

Canada’s agreement in principle to ensure that financial education is included in the school curricula has two implications. Either (a) financial education curricula is the end goal, or (b) it is a stopgap measure creating the eventual possibility of full-fledged consumer education, arguable because the Task Force on Financial Literacy (2010) recommended that Canada strive for “intensified consumer education efforts” (p. 66). A stopgap is a contrivance used when the usual solution is not at hand or not possible (Stopgap, 1993). To further develop this argument, the next section discusses the connections and differences among several consumer and financial education concepts.

## **Conceptual Distinctions and Connections**

The OECD defined financial education as follows:

The process by which financial consumers/investors improve their understanding of financial products, concepts and risks and, through information, instruction and/or objective advice develop the skills and confidence to become more aware

of (financial) risks and opportunities to make informed choices, to know where to go for help, and take other effective actions to improve their financial well-being. (2005, p. 4)

Canada is very much influenced by the OECD's initiative, thus, it is not surprising that the Canadian strategy document uses the concept *financial education* (not consumer education), encompassing financial well-being (without defining it). The national strategy involves "strengthening the financial well-being of Canadians by empowering them to manage money and debt wisely, plan and save for the future, and prevent and protect against fraud and financial abuse" (FCAC, 2015, p. 6). Note that Canada did not embrace the larger notion of "the interaction between personal financial decision-making and wider society and environment," as recommended by the OECD (2011, p. 15).

In related initiatives, the United States *did* define financial well-being as "having financial security and financial freedom of choice, in the present and in the future" (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau [CFPB], 2015a, p.1). In more detail, financial well-being is "a state of being wherein you: Have control over day-to-day, month-to-month finances; Have the capacity to absorb a financial shock; Are on track to meet your financial goals; and Have the financial freedom to make the choices that allow you to enjoy life" (CFPB, 2015b, p. 5).

In contrast to the narrower concept of financial well-being, consumer well-being has been defined as "a state in which consumers' experiences with goods and services... are judged to be beneficial to both consumers and society at large" (Sirgy & Lee, 2006, p. 43). It entails being satisfied with the entire consumption process, from acquisition to disposition. It encompasses perceptions of the impact of a product or service on various domains of one's life, is enhanced if one consumes locally, thereby supporting one's community, and improves if the purchased product or service meets the full spectrum of one's human developmental needs (Sirgy & Lee, 2006; Sirgy, Lee, & Kressmann, 2006; Sirgy, Lee, & Rhatz, 2007).

In the overall picture, consumer education that is focused on consumer well-being tends to be more holistic, with financial education and financial well-being comprising just one component of consumer education (Bannister & Monsma, 1982). The OECD (2009) still uses Bannister and Monsma's (1982) consumer education definition as a foundational document. Bannister and Monsma defined it as "the process of gaining

the knowledge and skills needed in managing consumer resources and taking actions to influence the factors which affect consumer decisions” (p. 5). Observe how this definition differs from the OECD’s (2011) suggestion that financial education should focus on the interaction between personal financial decision making and wider society and environment. Bannister and Monsma assumed consumers are in control and the OECD presumed consumers are being influenced.

Although Bannister and Monsma’s (1982) consumer education definition seems fairly straightforward, their conceptualization expands its meaning significantly. They developed a taxonomy of 154 consumer concepts, with three overarching concepts: (a) *consumer decision making* and household choice making (external and internal factors affecting consumer decisions as well as the stages of the decision-making process); (b) *resource management* and the consumer in the economy (personal finance, risk management, taxes, buying skills in all areas of one’s budget, and conservation of the environment); and (c) *citizen participation* and consumer protection and advocacy (including rights and responsibilities).

Earlier and more recent OECD (2005, 2013) guidelines for financial education focus almost exclusively on resource management, with little to no reference to citizen participation and consumer advocacy, and optional inclusion of the interaction between external factors on consumer decisions (OECD, 2011). Whether intentional or not, the OECD distinguished between consumer education and financial education, with Canada opting for a *national strategy* for financial education but *not* for consumer education.

## Financial versus Consumer Literacy

On a final, related issue, can financial literacy be equated to the larger concept of consumer literacy? Financial literacy is confined to managing personal finances to ensure individual financial well-being (OECD, 2011). Bowe (2007) described consumer literacy as buying the right product or service, getting the best deal, assuming more responsibility (rather than relying of regulators), learning new things, and protecting oneself and one’s family from fraud and harm. This definition aligns with Bannister and Monsma’s (1982) conceptualization of consumer education, intimating that financial literacy does not equate to consumer education.

Adkins and Ozanne (2005) defined consumer literacy as “the ability to find and manipulate text and numbers to accomplish consumption-related tasks within a specific market context in which other skills and knowledge are also employed” (p. 94). By this, they meant that literate consumers will need a combination of literacies. These include (a) how to read and interpret consumer-related documents, and (b) how to calculate and manage financial numbers and data, all of which necessitate (c) other consumer task-related skills and knowledge. The latter comprise decision making, information processing, complaining and redress, advocacy for rights and interests, a deep understanding of needs, wants and values, as well as responsible and sustainable choices; in other words, consumer education.

Himmelweit (2015) defined consumer literacy as a combination of skills, knowledge, and *engagement* in the marketplace. Engagement intimates more than passive participation or simple money management. Being engaged with the market means both being conversant with its dynamics and appreciative of interdependent relationships. Consumers would feel connected to other players in the marketplace, and those affected by their decisions. They would see themselves in a perpetual partnership with the marketplace(s), rather than just transaction-specific relationships. This notion of consumer literacy is much broader than the current OECD and Canadian definition of financial literacy, focused solely on personal financial decisions.

## Research Questions

The preceding discussion begs the question of whether the Canadian policy momentum for financial education (and financial literacy) meets the needs encompassed in the more holistic notion of consumer education. It is possible that this financial literacy momentum could compromise the propensity for the Canadian school system to expose learners to the more comprehensive concept of consumer education. Does Canada now have comprehensive consumer education, or is it the same fragmented approach as found in previous studies? Perhaps financial education is needed as a stopgap measure? The FCAC claimed that “[m]any children are learning about money basics in school” (2015, p. 3) (see also Loriggio, 2014). But is this really the case?

An even larger question is whether *money basics* is enough in today's post-global, financial-crisis world, which was the impetus for contemporary financial education in the first place? People are still living with aggressive and volatile global markets. Why focus on just coping skills when a more assertive and proactive approach may be merited? Financial education (focused on individual financial well-being) is a far cry from what full-fledged consumer education could offer Canadian students and future responsible citizens. The latter would socialize them to critique consumerism, global market structures, and prevailing ideologies (McGregor, 2011). Critically-formed consumers seem a better hedge against another global depression than do savvy money managers. These questions are now addressed using the results of a study on the status of consumer education in Canada in 2016.

## Method

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive research design seeking information so as to accurately describe something in more detail, creating a fuller picture by mapping the terrain. With descriptive research, little is known about the phenomenon, necessitating a systematic examination (per the status of consumer education in Canada in 2016). Descriptive studies describe what actually exists and how often, and then categorize the information (De Vaus, 2001). Figure 1 summarizes the research design protocol. Sampling and data collection occurred in early 2016.

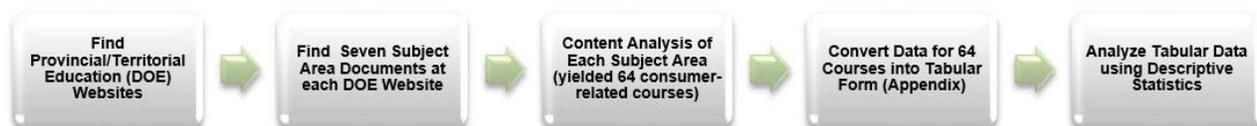


Figure 1. Research design protocol

## Sampling

First, the website was found for each provincial and territorial Department of Education (DOE) (or similar name) (not reported in this article due to changing URLs). Yukon uses

British Columbia's (BC) curricula, and the North West Territories (NWT) and Nunavut use Alberta's curricula, per the 1993 *Western and Northern Canadian Protocol* (2011). The territorial education agencies develop resources, content, and materials to make their provincial partners' curricula territorial-specific. When reporting results for this study, the Alberta/Yukon data and their analyses were reported as one, as were BC/NWT/Nunavut's.

Once the DOE websites were determined, relevant curriculum documents or home pages were found for the seven subject areas identified in the two earlier studies (CCC, 1970; McGregor, 2000): home economics (also called family studies), mathematics, business education, economics, social studies (often includes law), and CALM. Attempts were made to find both junior and senior high curricula (using these and related terms such as middle school, intermediate, and secondary).

## Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data for each subject area in each province and territory, a blank Word Perfect (WP) document was first created for each province/territory. A content analysis was used to scrutinize each subject area's curricula for consumer-related content (Krippendorff, 1980), using Bannister and Monsma's (1982) CLASSI. This involved searching using the CTRL-F function (Control-Find), which works for each of Microsoft Word, PDF, and HTML. The coding process employed pre-determined search terms, especially the truncated versions of two concepts fundamental to consumer education and financial education: *consum* (consume, consumed, consumer, consumerism, consumption), and *financ* (finance, finances, financial, financed). Other search terms in CLASSI were used when they were not found in the text surrounding *consum* and *financ*. Key examples include: personal, money, credit, resource management, budget, planning, rights, responsibilities, protection, law, contracts, advocacy, decision making, choices, buying, and *conserv* (for conserve and conservation).

As consumer education-related content was found in each subject area (e.g., law, social studies), the exact text was cut and pasted verbatim into the relevant provincial/territorial WP coding document, prefaced with the course title and grade level. If it was a lengthy body of text, content-specific pages were printed off, and stapled to that province's printed profile. After all seven subject areas' documents were coded using this

procedure, a smaller portion was recoded to check for intracoder consistency (Mackey & Gass, 2005), yielding an 80% intracoder reliability coefficient, deemed acceptable for repeated coding by the same person (Krippendorff, 1980).

This content analysis of provincial/territorial websites identified a total of 64 courses, captured in an amalgamated 15-page, single-spaced WP document (available upon request). These narrative data were converted to tabular form (see Appendix) and coded (content analysis) using Bannister and Monsma's (1982) CLASSI and analyzed using descriptive statistics so as to create subject-area profiles, provincial and territorial profiles, and grade-level coverage. As a caveat, no attempt was made to determine if the 64 courses were actually being taught in the more than 5,000 junior and senior high schools across the country (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada [CMEC], ca. 2011b).

## Results

Descriptive statistics provide simple summaries of data and observations being made (Mann, 1995), in this case reported using frequency counts, percentages, and descriptive narrative. In this order, results recount (a) consumer concepts reflected in Bannister and Monsma's (1982) CLASSI, (b) provincial and territorial profiles, (c) subject-area coverage, and (d) grade-level coverage.

### Consumer Concepts

The 64 courses were coded using CLASSI (Bannister & Monsma, 1982), yielding 216 instances of consumer education-related concepts. The majority (73%) pertained to resource management, with equal coverage for each of citizen participation (14%), and decision making (13%) (see Table 1). Within the overarching concept of Resource Management, 68% of the concepts pertained to financial planning, with the majority of those ( $n = 75$ , 70%) focused on credit, budgeting, investing, loans/mortgages, and money management. One quarter (25%) dealt with purchasing, focused on shopping decisions, financial services, and the buy/rent/lease decision for cars and houses. Conservation concepts appeared least often (10%).

**Table 1.** Overview of consumer concepts included in provincial/territorial curricula 2016 (N = 216 concepts)

Decision Making <i>n</i> = 28 (13%)			Resource Management <i>n</i> = 157 (73%)			Citizen Participation <i>n</i> = 31 (14%)	
External Factors	Internal Factors	Decision Making Process	Financial Planning	Purchasing	Conservation	Advocacy	Protection
15 (54%)	0	13 (46%)	107 (68%)	40 (25%)	10 (7%)	4 (6%)	29 (94%)
Economy/ market 7 Politics 1 Consumer- ism 8		Resources 1 Decision making/ con- sumer choices 12	Credit 19 Budgeting 18 Investing 16 Loans/mortgages 12 Money manage- ment 10 Personal financial planning 9 Savings 9 Insurance 5 Debt 3 Resource manage- ment 2 Taxes 2 Retirement 2	Shopping deci- sions 21 (cars, houses, food, clothing) Consumer contracts 3 Financial services 10 (especially banking) Buy/sell/lease dilemma 6	Especially con- sequences of one's decisions	Consumer awareness and consumer power 4	Rights and re- sponsibilities 8 Protection and legislation 9 Consumer laws 5 Warranties 2 Complain and redress 5

Course content that focused on Decision Making (13%) tended to feature either external factors impacting consumer behaviour (54%), or the consumer decision-making (choices) process (46%). There was no mention of internal factors shaping consumer decisions (e.g., values or life cycle stage). Citizen Participation concepts (14%) were heavy (94%) on consumer protection, and light (6%) on consumer advocacy and assertiveness. The former showed equal coverage (59%) between consumer protection and consumer responsibilities and rights. To a lesser extent (21%), consumer protection pertained to consumer laws and warranties. Consumer complaining and redress were seldom mentioned ( $n = 5$ , 2.3%) (see Table 1).

### **Provincial/Territorial Profiles**

Each province had courses that contained consumer education concepts (see Table 2 and Figure 2), but only Newfoundland/Labrador had a standalone consumer education course, called Consumer Studies, housed in Economics education. Provinces/territories averaged six to seven courses with consumer content, ranging from two to 11 courses. Four provinces/territories had four or fewer such courses, with the remaining six having either six courses ( $n = 3$ ) or 11 courses ( $n = 3$ ). As per Table 2, the provinces with similar profiles were BC/Yukon, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan (i.e., some combination of family studies/home economics, social studies, mathematics, business, and law). As a side note, these results mirror Marr's (2016) rudimentary canvas of national financial literacy programs in Canada.

**Table 2.** Consumer content in curriculum areas and provinces/territories (N = 64 courses)

Province/ Territory	Curriculum Areas								Total number of courses, <i>n</i> =
	Home Ec/ Family Studies	Social Studies	Math	Business	Law	Economics	Other courses	CALM	
Alberta/ NWT/Nun- avut				4	1			1	6
BC/Yukon	2	2	2	3	1			1	11
Manitoba	2						1 Sustainable Life Practices		3
NB	1	2			1	1		1	6
NFLD/Lab	1					1			2
NS	2	1	5		1		1 Healthy Living	1	11
Ontario	2	2	1	1					6
PEI	1		1		1	1			4
Quebec		1	1				2 - Ethics and Reli- gious Culture - Physical Educa- tion and Health		4
Saskatche- wan	2	4		1	1	2	1 Life Transitions		11
Totals	13	12	10	9	6	5	5	4	<b>N = 64</b>
	<i>n</i> = 25 (39%)		<i>n</i> = 30 (47%)			<i>n</i> = 9 (14%)			100%

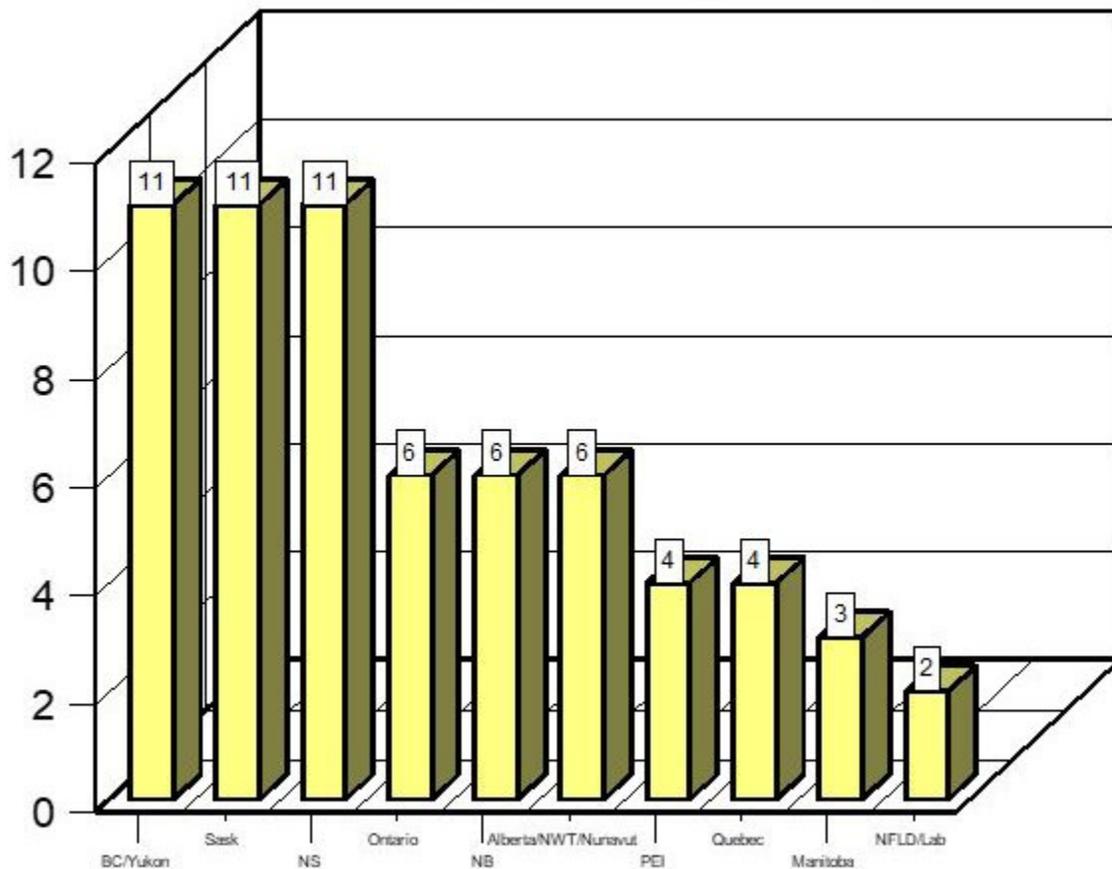


Figure 2. Evidence of consumer content by province and territory (N = 64 courses)

From a regional perspective, Western Canada and the Territories offered nearly half (48%,  $n = 31$ ) of the Canadian courses containing consumer content. As a reminder, the Yukon uses BC’s curricula and the NWT and Nunavut use Alberta’s curricula, perhaps accounting for the higher percentage. The four Atlantic provinces offered 36% ( $n = 23$ ), and Central Canada (Quebec and Ontario) offered 16% ( $n = 10$ ).

The data also revealed three unique approaches that merit further explanation, shown in Table 2 under *Other*. Ontario has developed a *Financial Literacy* initiative that Grades 9–12 teachers are intended to bring to all of their courses. This 200-page curriculum supplement is intended to aid teachers as they “help students acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to understand and respond to complex issues regarding their own personal finances and the finances of their families, as well as to develop an

understanding of local and global effects of world economic forces and the social, environmental, and ethical implications of their own choices as consumers” (Ontario Minister of Education, 2011, p. 3).

Quebec’s curriculum is underscored by a framework of five broad areas of learning, one of which is *Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities* (Quebec Minister of Education, 2004). All teachers in Quebec are tasked with ensuring “that students look critically at the consumer behaviour of their society and the values underlying it, that they examine the economic and social repercussions of such behaviour and that they acquire the knowledge, values and attitudes necessary to act as informed consumers who make wise choices and behave responsibly” (p. 26).

Manitoba has developed a framework called *Education for a Sustainable Future* to enable teachers to integrate sustainability into new and existing curricula in all grades. In addition to sustainability knowledge, skills, and values, the section on sustainability *life practices* contains consumer education concepts. Students will learn how to “demonstrate life practices and choices that balance the needs of human health and well-being, the environment, and the economy,” which entails making wise choices about consumption, and avoiding excessive consumerism (Manitoba Education and Training, 2000, p. 15). Although called sustainability, the content and intent align with Bannister and Monsma’s (1982) *conservation* component of resource management, with the jargon changing from *conservation* to *sustainability* in the early 1980s (Grober, 2007).

## Curricular (Subject) Areas

Home economics/family studies, social studies, mathematics, business, law, economics, and CALM all included consumer-related concepts, but in different amounts (see Figure 3). The preponderance (68%) of courses was in four areas: home economics/family studies, social studies, mathematics, and business. Mathematics, business, and economics constituted 37% of the course offerings. Some courses were coded as *Other*, accounting for less than ten percent (7.8%) of the concepts. These included Life Transitions, Healthy Living, Physical Education and Health, Ethics and Religious Culture, and Manitoba’s entire pan-curriculum course related to sustainable life practices (see also Table 2).

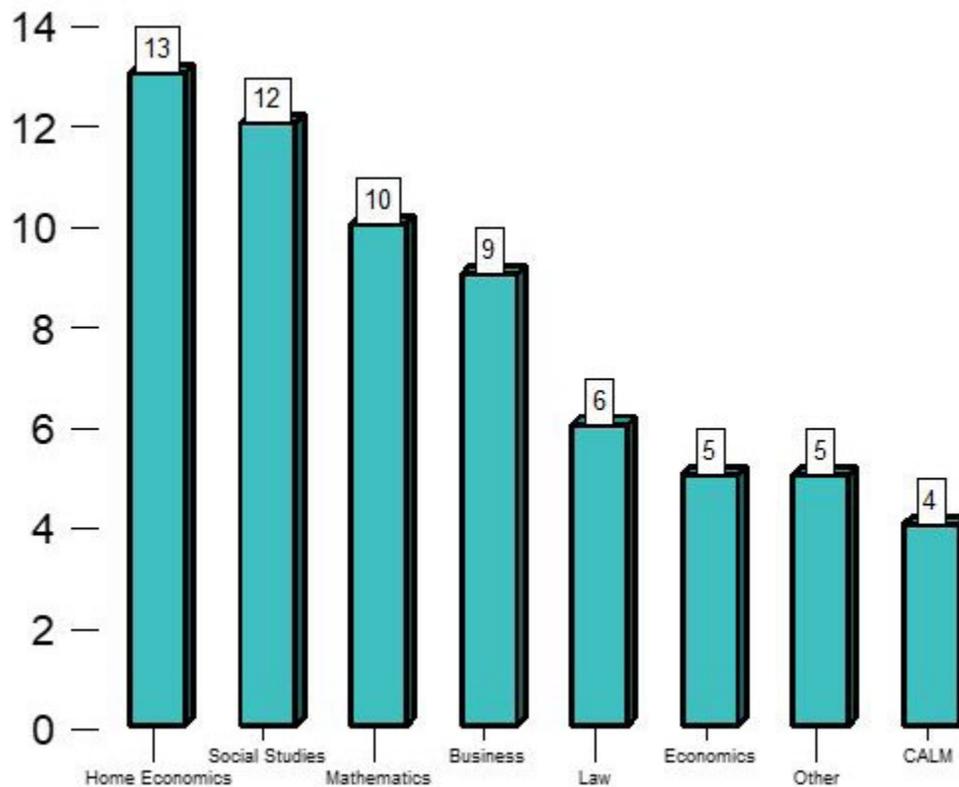


Figure 3. Courses containing consumer concepts, organized by subject areas (N = 64)

Each of the subject areas tended to focus on different aspects of consumer education, presenting fairly unique profiles (see Appendix). Home economics/family studies was the only subject that contained courses representative of all three major consumer concepts and what they represent: decision making, resource management, and citizen participation (Bannister & Monsma, 1982). It was the only subject area to use the term *resource management*, and the most likely to refer to buyership decisions (food, clothing, housing) and consumer rights and responsibilities. Home economics/family studies courses used concepts such as consumer awareness, discriminating consumers, consumerism, and responsible consumption. Aside from a brief mention by home economics, social studies was the only subject area that focused on consumerism and materialism and how this ideology impacts consumers' decisions. Social studies also spoke to conservation

and sustainability, and the impact of consumers' decisions on the environment. Together, these two subject areas constituted 39% of all courses containing consumer concepts (see Table 2 and Figure 3).

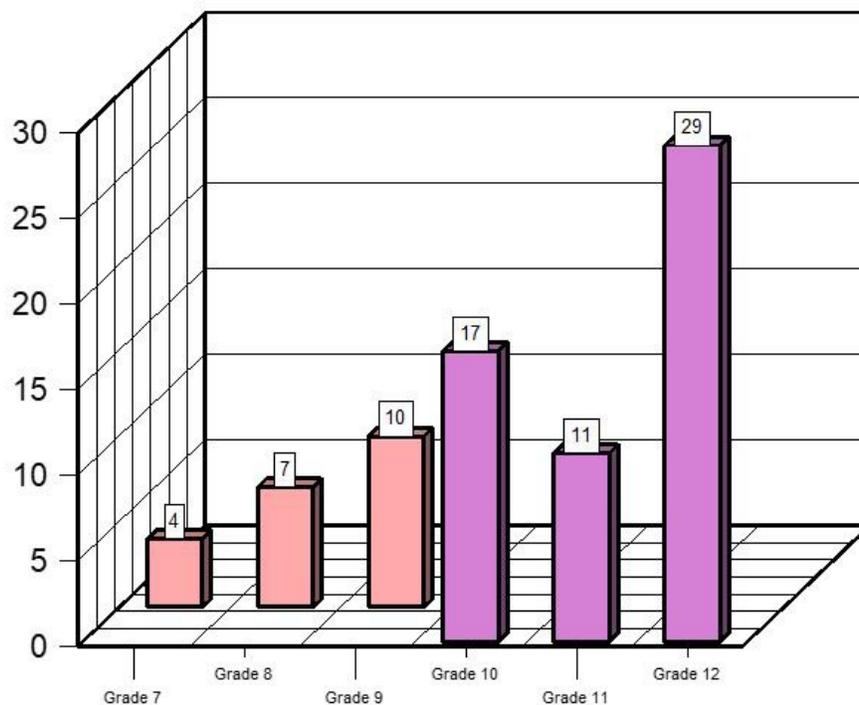
The law curriculum favoured consumer protection and consumer law. Business education dealt with budgeting, money and credit management, banking, financial planning, and investment strategies (portfolios). Mathematics often used the term *financial literacy* or *financial mathematics*, intending to teach students about banking, lending and borrowing, buyership, the buy/rent/lease dilemma, and, to a lesser extent, budgeting. Economics focused on how consumers fit into the economic system, and how they are affected by macroeconomics. Economics courses also touched on the economics of personal finances (e.g., investing, insurance, and money and banking). These four subject areas constituted nearly half (47%) of the courses containing consumer concepts (see Table 2). CALM examined financial planning, budgeting and money management, and, in some instances, consumer rights and responsibilities (i.e., consumer choices).

## Grade Levels

Most (73%) of the courses with consumer-related content were not offered until senior high, with 36% in Grade 12 alone (see Table 3 and Figure 4). Half (51%) of the courses were offered in Grades 11 and 12. Almost one quarter (23.1%) of the consumer content was in home economics/family studies courses, with most of this content provided in Grades 9–12. Only one subject, home economics, had content at each grade level. Social studies was like home economics in that it tended to have consumer-related content in both junior and senior high, but as discussed earlier, what was taught is very different. The *Other* category fit this general profile as well but, in reality, it represented three different courses (Ethics and Religious Culture, Physical Education and Health, and Life Transitions). One strand, sustainable life practices, spanned all grade levels in Manitoba. Each of mathematics, law, economics, and CALM had consumer content only in senior high. Business had content in five grade levels, most evident in Grade 10.

**Table 3.** Consumer-content courses organized by grade level

Curriculum Area	Grade Level						Total	
	7	8	9	10	11	12	n =	%
Home Economics/ Family Studies	1	3	4	5	1	4	18	23.1%
Social Studies	2	1	2	1		3	9	11.5
Mathematics				1	5	5	11	14.1
Business		2	2	5	1	2	12	15.4
Law				1	1	4	6	7.7
Economics					1	4	5	6.4
Other (see Table 2)	1	1	2	1	1	5	11	14.1
CALM				3	1	2	6	7.7
	4	7	10	17	11	29	N = 78	
	n = 21 (7%)			n = 57 (73%)			100%	



*Figure 4.* Number of consumer-content courses per grade level (N = 78)

## Discussion

These 2016 data reflect the same three patterns as the two former studies (CCC, 1970; McGregor, 2000): (a) except for a course in Newfoundland/Labrador, there were no standalone consumer education courses; (b) consumer education concepts were scattered throughout provincial/territorial curricula, creating a fragmented, piecemeal approach; and (c) the consumer concepts scattered across the nation pertained almost exclusively to the financial management dimension of resource management, with nominal coverage of the other two dimensions (buying/purchasing and conserving). There was even less coverage of the other two CLASSI concepts: consumer decision making, and consumer participation (i.e., advocacy, protection). The attention to resource management stayed about the same (roughly 75%) from McGregor's (2000) study, with a nominal decrease in consumer decision (17% down to 13%) and a noticeable increase in citizen participation (14% up from 5%, a 180% increase).

The most common subject areas to contain bits and pieces of consumer-related concepts included home economics, social studies, mathematics, and business education. Results indicated, however, that these subject-area courses offered very different dimensions of consumer education. As well, there is little likelihood that every student in each province will take *all* of the courses that contain a *piece* of consumer education. And, when consumer threads are an option within a curriculum, it has been reported that Canadian teachers tend to stay away from them because they "are uncomfortable teaching financial life skills" (OECD, 2013, p. 44).

One of the most unexpected results was that 75% of courses containing consumer-related concepts were offered in senior high, meaning students were not exposed to consumer education at a junior high (intermediate or middle school) level. This means that if students do not take secondary, senior high-level economics, business, law, or certain mathematics courses (nearly half [44%]) of the courses containing consumer-related content), they will leave public school with no consumer education. Although home economics/family studies was the subject most likely (23.1%) to contain consumer concepts, it is not mandatory, nor offered in all provinces. CALM is taught in Grade 12 (secondary) but it accounted for only 7.7% of consumer content, and is not mandatory or offered in most provinces. Social studies had a narrow focus on consumerism as an ideology, with no coverage of financial planning, resource management, consumer protection and

advocacy, or consumer decision making. This state of affairs reinforces the argument that financial education may be a necessary stopgap measure in Canada, paving the way for full-fledged consumer education.

There was little consistency from province to province. Although most provinces and territories averaged six to seven courses with consumer-related content, they were not the same courses, and did not contain the same material (see Appendix). Nearly half ( $n = 4$ ) of the provinces provided four or fewer courses. Students in Ontario and Quebec stood a higher chance of being exposed to consumer concepts than other provinces because of larger curricular initiatives in play (i.e., the financial literacy framework for Ontario, and the consumer rights and responsibilities broad area of learning in Quebec).

At first glance, these results suggest that the prospects for a unified consumer education curriculum in Canada are dim. There is no central organizing body responsible for consumer education in Canada, and education remains outside the realm of federal jurisdiction. The CMEC has never targeted consumer education as a national concern like it did for education for sustainability (ESD) (see CMEC, 2010). The Canadian government agencies that are focused on the consumer interest (especially the FCAC) have narrowed their focus to financial education and financial literacy, rather than the larger construct of consumer education. Study results lend support to framing the financial education movement in Canada as a necessary stop-gap measure. At a minimum, if students can be exposed to at least this limited information, they could learn how to manage their *personal* finances so they can improve their financial well-being. Stronger and better-informed consumers strengthen the economy, and may safeguard against another global depression.

That being said, financial education to become financially literate does not include the larger questions of what does it mean to *be* a consumer? What role do consumers play in an economy and marketplaces? What does it mean to live in a consumer society? What power does the consumerism ideology lord over people, mesmerizing them into relentless and meaningless consumption? Why are people engaging in excessive, unsustainable consumption? These larger philosophical, ideological, and moral questions (see McGregor, 2010) are more than just knowing how to make savvy and effective financial decisions when spending one's money. Without this larger context, financial education becomes just a stopgap measure, and shortchanges students from becoming *well-formed* consumers and global citizens.

In actual fact, from a hopeful perspective, this stopgap measure may not be a bad thing. A stopgap is a temporary, short-term fix that fills a gap until something better can be obtained. That “something better” is full-fledged consumer education. The results clearly show that full-fledged consumer education is not readily at hand and not really possible right now. So, in the short term, some financial education is better than nothing, and can be a bridge to more comprehensive consumer education, with the political will. As a caveat, Loriggio (2014) interviewed Gary Rabbior, CEO and President of the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education. Rabbior posited that Canadians would benefit from compulsory financial education, but he believed that “schools simply aren’t ready for such a major change at this time.” Nonetheless, the eventual entrenchment of consumer education in provincial and territorial curricula might become a reality, given that each province and territory has backhandedly validated the importance of aspects of consumer education by integrating them into existing subject areas (see Appendix). Anticipating stand-alone courses in the future is not that farfetched.

## **Recommendations**

Several “next steps” are possible. First, the jurisdictional issue is not going away. Canada does not have a federal department of education, nor is there an integrated national system of education. The closest thing is the CMEC, founded in 1967. It “provides leadership in education at the pan-Canadian and international levels and contributes to the fulfilment of the constitutional responsibility for education conferred on provinces and territories” (CMEC, 2011a). With the political will, the CMEC could draw inspiration from the energy emanating from the current financial education movement, and move toward a pan-Canadian consumer education curriculum, per McGregor’s (2000) call for the creation of a stand-alone consumer education curriculum for ready adoption by every province and territory.

Second, in the meantime, the FCAC and the Financial Literacy Leader could facilitate the development of ready-to-adopt modules or units on the three overarching CLASSI consumer education constructs (see Table 1), which curriculum planners or teachers can choose to integrate into their subject area. Albeit another stopgap measure, it could bridge piecemeal approaches to consumer education until a pan-Canadian approach

is achieved. To illustrate, social studies leaned toward the concepts of consumer society, consumerism, and materialism. Economics focused on the role of macroeconomics and market structures on consumer decisions. Teachers in these two subject areas might be interested in a unit on external factors shaping consumer decisions. Business, mathematics, and home economics/family studies were the most likely to contain information on financial planning and buyership, so these teachers may be inclined to use a unit on resource management. Law favoured consumer protection, legislation, and consumer complaints and redress. Teachers in this area of study might be drawn to a well-developed unit on consumer participation and protection, which includes advocacy, assertiveness, representation, and a voice in the policy process.

Third, any efforts around financial education or consumer education must ensure that students in all grades receive the curriculum, ideally a well-thought out, scope-and-sequenced curriculum so that learners can progress through increasingly difficult and sophisticated content. Fourth, in concert, existing teachers need inservicing so they are not afraid to broach these topics, regardless of the subject area they teach (Yetter & Suiter, 2015). Fifth, university teacher education programs should include courses or modules to orient pre-professional teachers to financial and consumer education concepts, like what was done with global and citizenship education curricula in Canada (see UNICEF Canada, 2012).

## Conclusions

This study recounted the status of consumer education in Canada in 2016. Results confirmed that nothing has changed since two earlier studies in 1970 and 2000. Consumer education is fragmented, with no assurances that what is on the books is being taught. Whether aware of this situation or not, the federal government embraced the OECD financial education initiative, and is actively promoting financial literacy in Canada, with a funded national strategy. Study results support the suggestion that this national financial education strategy may serve as a stopgap measure until the political will emerges to put in place a pan-Canadian consumer education curriculum for all grade levels, with appropriate educator socialization and training.

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